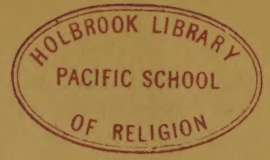


The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM



No. 96

AUGUST 27TH, 1941

DEAR MEMBER,

It is a good thing that the Editor of the C.N-L. should sometimes take a holiday—and a far far better thing as far as he is concerned, that he should take an irresponsible holiday—in other words that he should hand over his duties, lock, stock and barrel to others, without exercising a discretionary supervision over what they write. But though this drastic process may be good for him, it may not be good for you. And if you should find yourself acutely aware of this fact, I can only beg you not to blame him for anything that may be said in this issue, nor to attribute to him any opinions which may be expressed in it. You can, of course, blame him for selecting so poor a substitute. From such just censure I will not attempt to shield him.

THE NEED FOR A CHRISTIAN SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

A great deal has been said and written lately in the pages of the C.N-L. and elsewhere, about the need for a Christian social philosophy. One of the most emphatic demands was made recently in the University Church of Oxford, by the Archbishop of York, in the course of an impressive sermon to a packed congregation, which concluded an inspiring week's "mission" to the University. In making his plea, he recalled the fact that once before there had indeed, through a significant period of history, been such a philosophy. I assumed—and still assume—that he referred to the Canonist doctrine of the Middle Ages and its translation into contemporary secular legislation for price and wage regulation and the restraint of profiteering and usury. And I walked home reflecting dubiously upon the stages by which that logical integument of canonist doctrine had been burst asunder by the forcible impact of Tudor and Stuart commercial capitalism. Had its foundation and its subsequent decay contributed to the strength and endurance of Christianity or to the greater glory of the Church in whose firm hands it had been moulded? Of the Church—undoubtedly not. Of Christianity? The answer was less simple. It is true that among the pioneer merchants and traders of that enterprising age Christianity evolved new forms; and Protestantism with its individualist approach to spiritual truth provided a religious framework within which honest citizens could grow rich under the Grace of God, by the investment of capital and the exploitation of markets.

Must Christianity then always trim its sails for fear of incurring the accusation of obscurantism, and inadequate comprehension of a changing social and economic structure? The orthodox Marxian communist would smilingly reply that in fact it can do naught else, since men's philosophies are but the slow reflection of dynamic economic forces. But as Christians we have already rejected that simple and exclusive interpretation of religious experience. We cannot admit the necessity for such trimming. And, yet, how fraught with danger is the reintegration, to meet our modern needs, of a Christian "doctrine of society." Like the military strategists of to-day who are said to have prepared most thoughtfully for the conditions of the last war, or like the pedestrian who sets out perfectly equipped for yesterday's weather, our Christian "doctrine of society" may once again be irrelevant almost as soon as it is formulated. And if it is: who can assess the damage which results and has on occasion resulted from an open identification of

Christianity with adherence to a creed outworn, or undue preoccupation with problems that have lost their relative significance? For a small example of this last danger one has only to note the readiness with which the leaders of our Churches fall to discussing the relatively small upper-class problem of divorce, and compare it with their apparent unconcern over the much vaster and infinitely more home-shaking, home-breaking social problem of judicial separation.

All this may sound like a mere spate of destructive pessimism : an intimation to the Christian as such to keep out of the ring for fear of getting hurt. May it rather be regarded as a note of warning, sounded as the prelude to further reflections on the distinction between means and ends, the thread of truth which runs through Marxian dialectic materialism, and the grand possibility of achieving from age to age, a formative Christian critique of changing social and economic forms in terms of transcendent Christian motive.

THE B.B.C. AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Beginning this September, the B.B.C. is broadcasting under the title "Please Begin with Us," a special "discussion programme for young workers of 14 and upwards." The broadcasts will, it is announced deal with the part which youth should play in a democratic community both as workers and citizens. It is a reproach to us, as a Christian community, that there should in fact *be* young workers of 14 and upwards. No member of the professional or richer classes would dream of allowing his children to leave school at fourteen. Searching among my acquaintances I am glad to say I cannot find one who has even contemplated doing so. But as long as we persist in treating the children of the wage-earning classes as a separate biological species by allowing them to become wage-earners at this peculiarly inappropriate age, it is a good thing that the B.B.C. should give special attention to their needs. We commend the venture to the attention of scoutmasters, club-leaders, and their like, who are making heroic attempts to repair the damage to young life, wrought by reckless industrialism and a grievously inequitable system of education.

THE SUPPLEMENT

The author of this week's Supplement is a "Jack of all trades" who handles a wide range of subjects with the proverbial mastery of that interesting occupation.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Stocks

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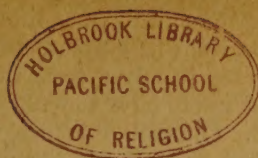
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VARIATIONS ON A THEME BY G. D. H. COLE

On July 16th the C.N.-L. presented a supplement by G. D. H. Cole so penetrating and so stimulating as to remain alive in the memory of its readers, stirring new mental speculations and giving new twists and turns to old ones. So much so, that it is scarcely necessary to reiterate its main tenor. But in case any reader missed it, let it be recalled that Mr. Cole reminded us that democracy as we conceive it to-day, having emerged from embryonic experiments in community living, and later passed through the Protestant experience of small religious groups, led men to the belief that they could govern themselves collectively in greater groups and eventually "take into their hands, by means of representative democracy, the government of the State." But hardly had this ideal translated itself into political forms, than the changing basis of society and the magnitude and complexity of its problems outran hopelessly man's capacity for collective control; and "the social mind was left groping." As a result, problems becoming too big for ordinary men to understand, there arose the danger that human actions might cease to be governed by the higher controlling mechanism of the conscious mind, the living part of the unconscious thus resuming its sway, with its tendency to accept contradictions and tolerate irrational conclusions. This fact, says Mr. Cole, lies at the very root of the failure of parliamentary democracy and the ease with which it can be swept aside. The solution, in his view, is to find democratic ways of living for little men in big societies through the experience of democratic community living in small groups. Historically, he is able to trace the growth of such experience in trade unionism, consumers' co-operation, local government, and a whole host of voluntary associations. In

our own time he sees new opportunities for its development in the small neighbourhood groupings which are producing new forms of democratic fellowship under the savage impact of war. Herein lies the salvation of democracy. His thesis is impressively anticipated in the C.N.-L. issue of July 9th by the reflections of a thoughtful and experienced social worker from East London.

DEMOCRACY AS MEANS TO AN END

Not one of us who looks round upon society to-day—or for that matter upon society as it existed in the years before the outbreak of war—can contest the seriousness of Mr. Cole's presentation of his problem. A strange mood of moral defeatism appeared to have settled, before the war, upon the champions of democracy. Democracy had come to be an overworked bedraggled word. There had been moments in the history of the nineteenth century when it had taken concrete shape and looked very glorious. Sometimes the shape of a man: a Mazzini or a Lincoln. Sometimes the shape of a political programme: the six points of the Charter, or a single political measure: the Great Reform Bill of 1832. To many women in the present century it was once summed up in three words: "votes for women" and to them it presented a cause worth living for and dying for. But to-day the word democracy is not so clothed for us. We think neither of a person nor of a particular programme when we use such phrases as: "the present challenge to democracy," or: "democracy on trial." What then do we think of? In its most precise political sense, democracy is what Mr. Cole assumes it to be, a system so devised as to secure that government shall be carried on with the consent of the governed, and (this of course is the constructive

aspect of it which Mr. Cole seeks to achieve) in such a way as to command the maximum of active co-operation from its citizens. But in that sense democracy is only a means to an end, and we must surely have something to say about the end. The end, of course, is the *individual* conceived as an end in himself and an important end. In the individual we recognize a separate entity, with certain rights, certain equal rights with other individuals indeed, such as the right to cultivate what natural faculties he has, and the right to share in the heritage of cultural experience and natural abundance which is the possession of all mankind. The Christian may here remind himself, with some relevance, that it was through an individual speaking to individuals that the supreme divine revelation came. It is, therefore, because of that fundamental belief in the value and rights of the individual as an end in himself, that the democrat is stimulated to exercise his ingenuity in thinking out social and political forms that will achieve the widest possible measure of government by consent and give maximum scope for the participation of individuals in the business.

Now if we think of democracy in this way there is only limited scope for the glorification of the "team-spirit" or the group. The "team-spirit" is useful because it achieves practical results in matters which require co-operative effort—and modern forms of wealth production and consumption make increasing demands upon this particular kind of usefulness. Incidentally it is morally salutary because it gives to the individual an opportunity to achieve some of his best efforts of self-discipline and altruism. But democracy does not concede to the "team-spirit" any mystical glorification of the group as something which, because it is a group, draws virtue from outside itself and reflects it back upon the individuals which compose it. If this then, is what we mean by democracy, whence comes the challenge? Is it merely the "fear of hugeness" indicated by Mr. Cole? Or are there other formidable challengers?

WHO ARE ITS CHALLENGERS?

It is doubtful if, in the sphere of reason, democracy has to-day any challengers at all. In the sphere of reason, the most formidable

challenge of our time has been that of Marxian communism reinforced by the stupendous advertisement of the Russian experiment. For there we have a programme expressive of a whole philosophy of life and a knowledgeable interpretation of the history of mankind; a programme which drew upon much solid learning in the process of reaching its conclusion and integrating its plan of action and by so doing, satisfied men's minds as well as their emotions. And of course it was a programme which, if it involved no *mystical* glorification of the group, at any rate demanded an attitude to the community strongly suggestive of such glorification, while at the same time denying fundamental rights to the perverse individual who chose to set himself in opposition. But to say that communism "has been" a challenge to democracy, is not to say that it is so to-day. To judge from the actions and utterances of our communist contemporaries, Marxian orthodoxy is melting like the snows of April before the blistering heat of a common danger, and there is good hope that the economic programme of communism may eventually become dissociated from the tortuous creed of its first practical exponents.

Is that common danger—the predatory armed might of Fascism—an alternative challenge? Physically of course it is; and to say that a challenge is physical is not necessarily to say that it is not also a challenge in the sphere of reason. Physical action is not necessarily irrational. A communist state dependent on overseas economic resources and heavily armed might constitute a physical challenge to democracy, assaulting our bodies as well as our minds. But Fascism, whatever else it may assault, does not assault our minds. Unlike communism it has no rational basis. It is a bundle of emotional urges expressed in semi-theological language and directed at the subordination of the individual to the tribal group. It may, on analysis, prove to be the expression of a rational class interest, but it is not itself rational. Its arch-exponent Adolf Hitler has, it is true, congealed his pathological prejudices into a fantastic theory of race; and coined such phrases as "blood and soil" which profess to embody a mystical conception of the relation between man and nature. But they are difficult to explain and it is rarely that

attempts are made to explain them. The best that Fascism's more serious exponents can do is to catch at tags of Bergsonian philosophy to justify their glorification of instinctive reactions—much as the adherents of social credit acclaim the abstruse arguments of Mr. J. M. Keynes because his conclusions remind them vaguely of their own. But that this unreasoned phobia is a physical challenge to democracy cannot be denied—and it is the more formidable to-day because of the existence of another challenger which Mr. Cole does not mention : Fascism's "fifth column"—the enemy within the gates co-operating or prepared at any moment to co-operate with the enemy outside.

FASCISM'S "FIFTH COLUMN"

Fascism's "fifth column" is not the British Union of Fascists. It is something more strategically dispersed and far less tangible. It is analogous to M. de Rougemont's distributed devil but less obviously devilish. There is in each individual the germ of a suicidal tendency. Obstinate from age to age the individual refuses to accept the belief that he *is* an end in himself or that his own self-realization is a satisfying aim. Such a destiny is not great or dignified enough for him. Instinctively he rejects it. And from age to age his rejection has been sanctioned by religious faith. Professor Whitehead has defined religion as "what a man does with his solitariness"¹—a solitariness more bleak than the loneliness of which Mr. Cole is conscious. To sum up, the individual must lose part of himself or he will be in danger of losing his zest for life. If he loses himself in that great body of spiritual experience which the Christian Church, for all its ineptitude, has so far succeeded in preserving through successive dark ages, so much the better for him. He will find himself again. It is the common experience of mankind that he does ; and indeed he was once authoritatively told that it would be so. And having found himself thus, he will be a good potential democrat if Mr. Cole and other constructive thinkers of our age can devise social and political machinery appropriate to his complex needs.

But if he does not lose part of himself thus, he may very readily develop a kind of suicidal mania—a longing to drown himself in the nearest duck pond. And Fascism with its mystical glorification of the human group has already provided millions of suicidal individuals with a most convenient and accessible duck pond. We have only to listen on the wireless (since we still cherish a sufficient element of democracy to be permitted to do so) to the response of a large crowd to one of Hitler's speeches, and straightway we hear the rhythmic dirge of solitary suicidal individuals drowning their solitariness in an easy emotional response to their more primitive instincts ; merging themselves in a mystically glorified group which denies that they are ends in themselves ; which takes their individuality from them—but does not give it back.

If that particular group were less openly predatory, and stank less odiously in the nostrils of humane and cultured individuals, it might constitute less of a physical challenge to our democracy and more of an emotional challenge. Nevertheless its "fifth column" remains a challenge and it is doubtful whether the constructive and imaginative handling of democratic forms advocated by Mr. Cole is likely of itself to solve the problem of how to achieve for democracy, the cradle of individual self-realisation, a more abundant life. That "fifth column" may frustrate his very purpose by conferring on those working groups in which he sees salvation, a "groupiness" which is no part of his plan. Only by the satisfaction of that instinct whose frustration is the cause of suicidal tendencies, can his plan be made effective. The time has gone by, if it ever existed, when individuals could lose themselves to a moderately satisfying extent in personal—especially in family—relationships, and in steady interesting work. The world in which we live does not offer to the common man sufficient security for such moderate satisfaction and it offers too wide a scope for envy and comparison. All of which is merely a tortuous way of saying that democracy cannot survive either in the crude form which we know or the perfected form visualized by Mr. Cole,

¹ The writer of this Supplement has never read the works of Professor Whitehead and could not either indicate or explain the context of this profound remark. In the opinion of the substitute editor, its use is therefore a piece of rank impertinence.

without Christianity. One might add the polite rejoinder that Christianity in its turn needs democracy—for the individual who loses and finds himself again, will present something better worth offering and better worth receiving if he has learned the use of freedom, claimed his share of the human heritage, and developed all his faculties, in a social environment which accords him the widest possible measure of liberty, equality and fraternity.

ECUMENICAL CHRISTIANITY AND THE WORKING-CLASSES

So that in fact we are confronted with a dual task : the task presented by Mr. Cole, of finding a more adequate political and social expression of the individual's need for self-government : and the task presented by Mr. Symons in his penetrating C.N.-L. Supplement on July 30th, of finding a more adequate religious expression for the individual's need of spiritual self-realisation. Placing Mr. Cole's and Mr. Symons' supplements side by side, which is where they properly belong, a significant coincidence emerges. The formative period of democratic achievement as visualized by Mr. Cole, i.e., the fighting years of Chartism, of co-operation, of trade unionism, is the period when, as Mr. Symons shows, the ordinary man found his spiritual home in Nonconformity with its congregationalism and its familiar phraseology. Satisfied with his consciousness of a relation to God and the form in which he expressed it, he was able to bring great energy to bear on the constructive democratic control of his social relations. Which confirms the

belief that to-day, we shall not solve Mr. Cole's problem unless at the same time we solve Mr. Symons'.

For the solution of Mr. Cole's we may look to our sociologists, and social workers, our practical administrators and economists. To Mr. Cole himself, perhaps, in his capacity of Chairman of the Nuffield Social Reconstruction Survey. But Mr. Symons' problem is a tougher nut. Can Nonconformity provide the answer? Mr. Symons is dubious because its ministers are no longer "called by God from among the people" and its leadership has passed to the middle classes. But there are other reasons for dubiousness among them, the fact that the Free Churches still use the idiom of an older generation and their language seems strange and often repellent to our own. Can the Church of England provide the answer? It too speaks a language strange to the common man of to-day. But since that language happens to be Shakesperian English and as such, dateless (not in the Lancastrian sense) it is up to Church and State to teach the common man to understand it. It is not only a question of idiom however. Are its organisation and its leadership such as can adapt themselves to the needs of a democracy more than half of whose members are women and about three-quarters of whom are dependent upon weekly wages and preoccupied with the conditions under which such incomes are earned and spent? What reply can we expect of a Hierarchy exclusively male and almost exclusively middle-class?

Well at any rate, Mr. Cole and Mr. Symons have, between them, left us thinking...

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